

" **Education**, with its supporting system of compulsory and competitive schooling, all its carrots and sticks, its grades, diplomas, and credentials, now seems to me perhaps the most **authoritarian** and **dangerous** of all the social inventions of mankind.

It is the deepest foundation of the modern and worldwide **slave state**, in which most people feel themselves to be nothing but **producers, consumers, spectators**, and "**fans**", driven more and more, in all parts of their lives, by **greed, envy, and fear**. My concern is not to improve "education" but to do away with it, to **end the ugly and antihuman business of people-shaping** and let people shape themselves."

-John Holt

SPRING

SKOLAN

BLOW UP
THE SCHOOL!

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There was never a time where anyone said "do I have to do that?" or "Why can't he/she do that instead?". To me this is an example of a healthy education system. A place where children and grown-ups work together to find information about the things they want to learn and need to learn.

they wanted. I do believe that evaluations are a good way of "testing" yourself and finding out if you are on the right track. Self-evaluations should be written for the students themselves, to analyze your own knowledge and figure out what you need to study more. Evaluations from teachers would be good as long as they have no connection to any sort of grade. They could be a good way for the student to find out what they need work harder on and so on.

For younger children it could work basically the same way. You have a group of grown-ups who are there for the children to facilitate their learning, and if the kids want help with learning how to read or write or whatever, the adults can assist them.

I think it's important that kids of different ages learn together, who would be a better teacher to teach someone to read than a kid who had just learned it herself. I also think that kids would learn how to co-operate and work together this way. Imagine a school where kids themselves could decide what they wanted to learn and how they wanted to learn it. Of course some guidelines would probably be needed, but the structure could be totally different.

For example, I read about some school, I don't remember where, where the kids had a class of some sort and the teacher made a comment about a student's nice new wool-sweater. This led to the student asking how wool-sweaters are made and the teacher said "why don't we try to find out".

From this the children decided that they wanted to know everything about wool, they went to a farm to see the sheep, then to a factory that made wool-sweaters, then from there they got interested in clothes in general and what kinds of clothes people wore in the past. On their journey to information about the sweater they worked through subjects like math, social science, chemistry, environmental issues, history and so on.

The children decided together as a group what direction their journey would take and they all delegated tasks to fit their own desires and needs. For example, the kid who liked math got to do the budget for the sweater-making, and the kid who liked clothes got to research fashion and then they shared what they had learned with the rest of the class.

This analysis and criticism of school and education is based mainly on my own experiences, my 12 years of mandatory school in Sweden, and my 3 years of college in the U.S. I relate the problems I bring up to experiences of my own life but I'm sure that most of you recognize them from your own schooling in one way or another.

I believe that school is one of the factors in our lives that affects us the most, and as it is now I see those affects as being almost exclusively negative.

Of course I'm not opposed to the concept of learning or places where people can go to learn things. I am opposed to the way school and education works today and in our society.

I think a lot about alternatives and will talk about that later, but I want to make it clear that this is something that I have started thinking about fairly recently and I don't have solutions for everything. I have ideas and suggestions and I hope to inspire people who read this to examine their own education and think of ways to improve it.

A lot of my writing is inspired by John Holt, a writer and education-radical who opened up my eyes to things that have now greatly changed my life.

I recommend all of his books:

How children learn
How children fail
The underachieving school
What do I do Monday?
Freedom and beyond
Escape from childhood
Instead of education

Never too late
Teach your own
Learning all the time

Books by other authors that I also recommend:

Pedagogy of the oppressed by Paul Friery
The lives of children by George Dennison
The naked children & Hooked on books by Daniel Fader
Summerhill & Talking of Summerhill by A.S. Neill
The way it spozed to be by James Herndon
Deschooling society by Ivan Illich

Alternatives

I believe that there should be some sort of educational facilities to where people could come to exchange knowledge.

I'm not sure exactly how they would work but I can imagine them being a building with people of different professions and with different knowledge who were willing to share this knowledge with anyone interested.

People could volunteer as sources of information, for example, I'm good at cooking and you want to learn how to cook so you call me up and maybe we get a bunch of people together and I teach you what I know.

There could also be study groups where material was read and then discussed by the participants of the group.

Libraries are a great educational facility that already exists, and I picture my ideal "school" being more like that.

I picture places kind of like colleges too, only free of course, where people could come and take the classes

Some brave little soul, I can't remember who, finally spoke and said that we weren't going to move until she apologized and allowed us to go on our trip. Her face turned red and I seriously thought she was gonna have a heart attack. "I'm gonna call all of your parents!!! Now go inside!" she screamed as loud as she could.

By this time a lot of people got scared and slowly started to get up and walked to the classroom. But some stayed and I was one of them.

I remember two of the others that were with me but I think we were at least five that didn't move. She said after a little while that everyone had to wait outside while she talked to us in the classroom. We finally got up and walked with her into the classroom and explained to her that we didn't find anything wrong with what we had done and that we didn't deserve to get punished.

We said that this was a tradition that takes place every year and that at least we didn't put condoms or shaving foam on her car. We said that it was unfair that the other class, who had done something even worse, didn't even get punished.

She said that she could expect something like this from all of us except me.

"Karin, how could you do this?" she said, with tears in her eyes, "you, who are such a good student!" She wasn't really upset over her car, she was upset because her favorite student, the most obedient of them all, had disobeyed her.

This is one of the bravest things I've done in my life and it still makes me feel really good to think about it. It's crazy to think about how organized and determined we all were; how we came to the conclusion that we had been treated unfairly and had to do something about it.

We especially felt strongly about the money that we had all helped to gather by putting on different kinds of shows for our parents, having bake-sales etc.

I don't know where the idea of the sit-down strike came from but it worked perfectly. I also think fondly of how well spoken we all were when we defended our actions to her in the classroom even though there was only five of us left and even though she tried as hard as she could to intimidate us.

Learning

It is interesting to me to think about how in our society we separate learning from the rest of our everyday lives. We are taught to believe that learning takes place in school and in school only, and that it is something that has to be boring and often times painful.

We are also taught that learning is something that is done to us and that we cannot do on our own; a teacher has to be there to feed us the information and we need to swallow it without questioning it. The question I ask myself then is, how much did I actually learn in school and how did I learn it?

Do I even remember all the things I memorized for tests? No, I don't. I hardly remember any of it and this has a lot of reasons, one of them being that true learning can only happen when the learner wants to learn and takes an active role in his or her own learning process.

Doing is learning

I'm now in a two-year film and video program at a community college, and what I've realized by being in it is that doing is learning. In other words, no one can tell me how to operate a camera or light a set by telling me about it or point to pictures in a book or

make me read about it. It is true that these things might help but I will only truly learn it by doing it myself.

I am the kind of person who has to press a button about a million times before I remember what it's for, but once I know, I don't forget. The same thing happens when learning a language. I have to repeat things over and over again until they finally stick. I almost always remember what I have learned when I can see how it is connected to something in my life. For example, I make use of a new word in a foreign language or I press the right button on the equipment and get the outcome that I was looking for.

This kind of learning happens because it makes sense. It makes sense to me what a certain light does to the shadows on an actors face after I've tried it and done it myself. It is also crucial when learning things that they are relevant to me.

I'm sure a lot of us sat through most of our classes asking ourselves why we had to learn this.

Children learn how to talk by being surrounded by people who talk and realizing that it would be useful to them to be able to do it. They understand that people who talk get what they want, you accomplish something by communicating and therefore they start to try to talk. Of course they can't do it right away, but they learn by trying and by doing it.

The same thing happens when children learn to read and write. They realize once again that this is something that grown-ups and older children do to communicate, and to get what they want. They are surrounded by written language in their lives and gradually become curious to what it means.

My other favorite memory is from the 6th grade. At my school it was tradition to play a little trick on your teacher when graduating from the 6th grade, since you've then had that teacher for 3 years and is starting a different school the next year. The students usually do something to their teacher's car, and so did we.

We wrapped her whole entire Volvo in toilet paper and stole some flowers and put them on it. The other class sprayed their teacher's car full with shaving foam and filled condoms with water and taped them to the windshield, so we were pretty nice.

When my teacher came back and saw her car she flipped out. She yelled at us for a long time and told us that we were the worst students she'd ever had. My class was told that by a lot of teachers actually, no wonder since we were 30 kids in the class.

Anyway, she said that she was gonna keep us from going on our class trip and take all the money we had saved

up herself. Then she stormed off and said that we'd better had cleaned everything up when she got back.

We sat down as a class and started discussing what to do. We were all very pissed off, hurt and disappointed.

Someone came up with the brilliant idea that we should go on strike.

We all sat down by the wall on the school building (everyone except three people who didn't want to get in anymore trouble) and began our sit-down strike.

We waited for about an hour before she came back and when she did she said "well, get up, go inside why are you sitting here".

No one said anything and no one moved. "Go in to the classroom!" she said, a lot louder this time.

Still no one moved or spoke. "What are you doing??" she demanded to know.

My best school memories (quite possibly my only great ones)

When I was in 4th grade our teacher, a scary looking old lady who changed clothes twice a day, used to read to us. Every morning of the month of December we got so turn out the lights and light candles on our desks and she read out loud from a story that took place around Christmas.

The book is over 300 pages long and I remember how that seemed like a million pages to me. I couldn't understand how anyone could finish a book that long.

She would ask us if we thought that we would be able to finish it and everyone screamed "yeah"! The thought of us getting to hear the whole book seemed wonderful to us all.

I think back at this and realize that the reason this was so enjoyable to all of us was that we were never tested on it. We didn't have to memorize or learn anything.

All we had to do was rest out heads on the desk, close our eyes or stare at the dancing candle flame and listen.

Every child in my class was completely swept away by the story about the boy who was shrunk to the size of a matchbox as punishment for being mean to some of the animals on his farm.

He then becomes friend with one of the geese and together they fly across Sweden with the other geese. It is a history, geography and children's book all in one and I learned more about Sweden from that book than from anything I was ever forced to read.

A lot of children teach themselves to read before they start school with a little assistance from a grown-up. They pick up a book, something that is of interest to them and ask someone to read it to them. After having the book read to them many times they start to make the connections between the length of a word and how it sounds, etc. it has been estimated that children teach themselves to read in about thirty hours, that is one school-week.

The irrelevance of the curriculum

I think that most of the things we are taught in school seem so boring and hard to learn to us because we are never told why we need to know them and how we will benefit from them. Over and over again we are told when asking the question why we have to learn something that "it is something that everyone should know".

As a child I had a very hard time understanding why certain things had to be learned, like math for example. I understood how it could be helpful to know basic math in your everyday life but I never understood how algebra had any sort of connection to my life and I still don't see how it would.

I haven't studied math in over 8 years and I've forgotten most of what I learned and I'm doing just fine. Now, there are a lot of people who take pleasure in studying math and use it in their everyday lives and I think that is great, but not everyone is like that and therefore has a hard time learning it.

It is always hard for me to learn things that I cannot see, hear or experience, things that are disconnected from my life. History for example, I feel like I missed out a lot on not paying attention to my history classes and falling asleep whenever reading a history book.

A subject as important as history (the real history, not necessarily what we are taught in school) should be taught in way the student can make the connection between incidents in the past and things happening in society today.

The things I did learn in school I learned because they had a connection to my life, or when I could experience them. For example, in my history class we went on a fieldtrip to an "ancient village", a place where the children got to experience the kind of life people lived in the Stone Age. Being there and tasting the kind of food they ate, seeing the kinds of clothes they wore etc., suddenly made it all real. It was a way for me to touch history directly and thereby connect with it.

I'm used to being told by teachers that what I just said was wrong if I'm not absolutely sure that I have the right thing to say I don't speak.

I've been taught that there is no such thing as figuring things out as you discuss them; either you know something or you don't.

I feel intimidated by books.

I feel like I can't possibly know anything about a certain subject unless I have read every single book about it.

I feel like I'm inferior to people who have read and studied things more than me.

I look at my friends, who might have greater knowledge than me in some subjects, as teachers or figures of authority.

I still look up to my teachers as people who have all the right answers.

I feel guilty when I don't do my homework.

I don't trust my own judgments.

This is exactly how they want us to turn out, weak obedient little creatures who will never be a threat to their power.

But I'm changing all of this. It's a slow process; 15 years of school and brainwashing is hard to get over. But I am changing.

How school affects me in my everyday life

The 1 1/2 that I have spent in this program so far did a lot of bad things to me.

First of all when all the time you have in the day is spent on homework and classes you lose a sense of yourself and who you are. There was no room for my own creativity and expression and I felt worse and worse. I grew a lot stronger over summer-break and this year I'm doing a lot better. I force myself to sit down and read other books that schoolbooks and write and paint and hang out and get worse grades.

School in general has had a greater impact on me and affects me more in my everyday life than I would even like to admit.

I feel intimidated in groups of people.

I'm afraid to speak my mind.

I've been taught that it's ok for boys to be louder and take up more space.

I've been told so many times that girls don't talk as much as boys do and even though I don't believe in it, it's there in the back of my head and it keeps me from speaking.

I'm afraid that what I have to say is wrong.

I'm afraid that I don't have everything completely figured out in my head so when I speak I will be questioned and my opinion will be invalidated.

I've been taught to think before I open my mouth and have all my thoughts prepared.

I also know that the things that I remember the most from my schooling are the things that I wasn't tested on.

Another important issue to bring up is what we are actually taught. To me it is obvious that the school system was put together in a way that makes sure that students learn what the authorities want them to learn. For example, the authorities version of the history, or what the authorities classify as classical literature etc.

Hating to learn

Not only does school and education make it hard for children or anyone else to learn, a lot of times it makes us hate to learn. When we are in elementary school and high school we hate it mostly because we are forced to do it, but even in college, where people come freely to learn what they want, people start to hate learning.

I talked to student in my program and he said that he came into this program with desires and dreams but that they now are all dead. The program and the way it is structured has made him and so many others hate to learn about the things he loved.

When I started this program a year and a half ago we were 32 students, now we are 13. You would imagine that this would tell the staff and faculty something about the quality of their education but whenever it is brought up, we get the response that the people who dropped out were lazy or not fit for the program. I could talk about all the things that I hate about this program for pages and pages but I'm not going to.

I do want to mention a few factors though. First of all the program is designed to teach us all the things you learn in a 4-year program in two years. The main first year instructor believes firmly in negative reinforcement, we are told over and over again that this program is a preparation for the "real world" and since we are going to be miserable in the real world we might as well get used to it here.

For example, a very radical teacher at my school (unfortunately not in my program) doesn't believe in tests and therefore didn't give any in his class. The school told him that he had to have a least one final, in order to be able to grade his students. Final-day comes and when the students sit down he tells them that yes, he has a test for them but that they don't need to take it if they don't want to. He said that if they didn't want to take the test they could just leave. Only two people out of around 30 got up and left. Why did the other ones stay?? Maybe they were afraid that this was a trick by the teacher and that not taking the test would lower their grades or maybe they thought that they would never know if they learned anything if they didn't take the test. They were so brainwashed from years and years of testing that the idea of not being tested seemed strange and frightening to them.

This leads to students feeling that they don't know their own worth unless someone verifies it with a grade or diploma of some sort. I do that myself all the time, it feels like if I don't get a grade from a teacher on my paper it isn't worth anything and I can't possibly know if it is good or not.

Another thing about tests is that they in no way prove what a student knows; they favor the clever guesser or the student who has figured the teacher out the best. I got perfect proof of that last quarter in my script-writing class.

We had two tests and several writing exercises due in the class. The teacher was very much surprised when in the middle of the quarter, even though our writing got better and better, we did really bad on the test. He tried to figure out if we were doing the readings we were supposed to and most people claimed that they did. (Which I think is true because the book was really entertaining)

He said that maybe we weren't doing as well as he thought we were after all. He simply couldn't understand that our improved scripts were more proof of our abilities than some test with a few random, strangely formulated questions.

This has a great affect on the lack of communication there is between students and teachers, I'm sure that a lot of things could be done to improve the schools if we would only listen to suggestions from the students. But such a discussion can never be free and democratic with the power the teachers have over the students.

Even on a college level where you would think that students have a little more power since they pay for the education, a dialogue where students give suggestions or critique almost always turns into, the teacher either getting too defensive of his/her own work and denying everything, or him/her trying to convince the students that they are wrong.

This happened in my program, we sat down with two of our instructors and talked about what we find hard in the program and what needed to be changed. Right away we were told that no changes could be made for this reason or that and that we were lucky that we weren't out in the "real world" or in some other film school where things would be a million times worse. Not even with every single person testifying to there being too much homework would the teachers admit that the workload is a little much.

I find it interesting to look at the role a teacher plays in the classroom, the teacher isn't only there to supervise the learning process but more so to lead it. Few other people talk as much in their workday as teachers. This would make sense since they are the ones providing the students with the information they are supposed to learn. Nevertheless, this is taken way too far; the teachers do nothing but talk and the students aren't allowed to do anything but listen quietly.

This leads to the students not being able to question the information that they are fed or to explore their own ideas with other students. This is especially harmful in the early stages of schooling, when children are eager to learn. The teachers and their obsession with order, control and obedience teach the children that it is not ok for them to talk or ask questions or speak their mind unless the teacher allows them to, and even then only in limited ways.

in school. How can you learn good communication skills if you never get to practice?

We are taught never to question any authority figure. We are punished for not obeying and rewarded for conforming to the rules. We are taught to obey no matter how stupid and illogical the order is. We are taught that certain people should be able to tell us what to do, without asking for our opinion or consent. We are graded on our ability to repeat facts not our understanding of them, and we are told that there is only one "right" answer and if we don't know it we are not worth anything.

School teaches us that we should trust the authority figure to always have the right answer no matter if it contradicts our own experiences. We learn in school not to question the teachers, and are discouraged from any critical thinking. In other words we are prepared for a life where we should never question the facts that we are told by the corporate media, television, advertisements, corporations, the government, religion, or any other authority figure.

School is designed to teach us to obey so that we will fit in, in a world of bosses, politicians, police and so on. We are taught to feel inferior.

We are also taught to be on time, and live by the clock. We are prepared for a life in the workplace where "time is money". We are taught to be efficient and productive in order to fulfill the needs of the capitalist system in which the authority wants us to work.

How can anyone learn anything from someone you know is going to evaluate and judge your every step? Teachers, the way they work in our educational system today, can never be a good source of information for any student. There can never be a truthful and positive exchange of knowledge when one person has power over the other.

Therefore, teachers, like most authority figures, soon become the enemy. They are the ones that have the power to make our lives miserable; they in a lot of ways determine our future.

The idea of children having to be forced to do things in order for them to do them seems strange to me. It is basically saying that the curriculum that the school has put together will in no way be interesting or fun enough for the children to want to learn it, unless we force them to do it.

But what about how children learn things before they go to school?? No one forces children to learn how to talk or walk or ride a bike. They learn it because they want to learn.

The same way grown-ups learn things because they want to or because it is beneficial to them. No one forced me to learn how to paint, yet I spent hours and hours practicing (and failing) until I was pleased with my skills as an artist. The same goes for everything we do in our free time, no one has ever been forced to learn how to skateboard, play guitar in a band, cook good food for your friends, do laundry, and so on.

The idea of children being spoiled and lazy makes them act that way. Of course you are going to start acting a certain way if everywhere in your life there are people and situations that tell you that there is no other way to be or act. Teachers and society's poor faith in students' independence and worth is one of the saddest things that I see in my life.

From day one we are told that we won't get anything without working hard for it and without going through hell. Why can't learning be fun?

We also learn that not all of us can be successful and "good" students and that we have to fight for the grades. We are taught that you have to work hard to get good grades and people who get bad grades are lazy and deserve to not do as good in society. School teaches us that people who are poor or less well off put themselves in that situation and that they didn't work hard enough.

School and capitalism

Greed is one of the first things we are taught in school, we are taught (not directly but indirectly) that in order to get good grades you need to stab your

friends in the back and compete with them at all times; not only for the good grades but also for attention from the teacher.

The same way we learn how to read a teacher we also learn how to bluff and cheat when there is something we don't know. Because if we don't we risk being humiliated in front of our friends and I think that is something that most people are terrified of.

This we take with us and practice at work as well, most people, even though they might not admit to it, learn pretty soon how to work as little as possible and how to make it seem like you are doing more work than you actually are.

Then there is of course the money issue of the schools themselves but I won't go into that too much.

Education is free in Sweden but that doesn't mean that the schools are equal in anyway.

Schools in poor suburbs and neighborhoods are worse than schools in other areas not because the students are worse but because those school usually have less money. Less money means low-paid miserable teachers, which leads to unfair treatment of students which leads to student vandalism which leads to a bad and negative school-environment which leads to the students getting bad grades, and so on.

School is a prison

Vandalism happens at every school. In every educational facility students show their misery and unhappiness through vandalism of some sort. To me vandalism in schools makes perfect sense.

Children are forced to be in school and forced to learn things they don't want to learn; of course they are going to be miserable and of course they are going to try to get back at whatever it is that causes their misery.

Society tries to make it out as it being the students who are the cause of the destruction when the schools themselves actually cause it.

I'm sure all of you know some students who "freaked out" as some point during your school years. There are

endless stories of students beating up their teachers, throwing chairs, trying to set the school on fire and in the U.S. even killing their teachers and fellow students.

Students act like people put in jail, all their reactions are responses to being held someplace against their will, to being forced to do something you don't want to do.

Most of students' high school years are dedicated to finding ways to skip school and getting out of doing homework. Finding ways to escape their prison if only for a few hours.

You are required by law to go to school five days a week for 12 years of your life (at least in Sweden). School is a prison; it is a place that you have to be in, often times against your will. But not only do you have to be there, you also have to do work outside of class.

When mandatory school was first introduced it was designed to teach the children of the stupid and ignorant people about the true values of the country, religion especially. It was designed to make sure that the uproar-ish farmers and others were kept in place by teaching them to obey and never question their government or ruler.

It is suggested that it was also to keep poor people from forcing their children to work.

Authority

School is possibly the first place in our lives where we get to experience the true evils of authority.

(Except for the authority in a parent-child relationship, which is very different). We are taught that we have to sit down, be quiet, pay attention to things we don't understand and can't relate to, that we shouldn't communicate with our friends, and many other stupid things.

Many adults complain about the lack of communication skills that young people have today, but at the same time they encourage the kids to be forced to be quiet